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ABSTRACT

The challenge of "ruralizing" teacher preparation programs is to teach teachers to think with sufficient critical intent to violate professional norms that have been unhealthy for rural schools and communities. Universities are institutions with cosmopolitan rather than local purposes. Over the centuries, the mission of higher education has shifted from serving society as a whole to serving individuals. At the same time, philosophy has almost disappeared as a field of study, supplanted by an emphasis on the development of expertise. As it prepares students for the myriad professions, the university diffuses technical rationality as the most "useful" form of mind and virtually abandons forms of rationality characteristic of philosophy, thereby subverting both intellect and feeling. The work of the mind has been restricted to the path of economic instrumentalism, advancing scientific and industrial "progress" and, most recently, the global economy. Underlying these developments are assumptions about the desirability of large size, efficiency, technological progress, and unlimited consumption--assumptions that have helped to create many social and environmental problems and to undermine rural community life. The absence of philosophy from professional preparation is particularly bothersome in the case of teacher education. Properly educative experiences develop character, and character development depends upon ethical action in the local sphere. Teacher educators who would build a program that resonates with their rural locale must honor the local genius that shapes character and must also embrace values of sustainability, social justice, and democracy. These mutually reinforcing ideas form the basis of an education that cultivates civic virtue--a major shift in thinking about the public purpose of education. Contains 28 references. (SV)

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Public Purpose and the Preparation of Teachers for Rural Schools

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Public Purpose and the Preparation of Teachers for Rural Schools

A news story about an infamous chapter in the life of the Tuskegee Institute was aired recently by National Public Radio (NPR, 1997). The infamy is reportedly so great that the single word "Tuskegee" is commonly used to signify the scandal and all it implies, and this despite the Institute's long legacy of service to African Americans. The report told of a syphilis study in which patients (poor, Black men) were left untreated in the joint name of science and progressive sentiment. The hidden logic of the study, according to the report, was an attempt by Black physicians to disprove racist allegations of deficiency. The efforts were so involute that the story considered them to have been outpaced by social change. The incredulous public now asks, "How could our own doctors have acted this way towards our own people?" The general tendency is, reportedly, to personalize: Bad people do bad things. One commentator, however, briefly mentioned the role of professionalization in subverting the common sense and perhaps the humanity of those professionalized. She implied that systematic distortions in professional preparation may have prevented the doctors and nurses from thinking critically and reaching conclusions that violated professional norms. We begin our own story with this one in order to dramatize our sense of the need to attend to meaning and purpose in programs that seek to prepare teachers to serve rural students, communities, and the culture of rural life. The Tuskegee story, of course, is also a rural story.

That is the challenge of "ruralizing" teacher preparation programs: to think with sufficient critical intent to violate the professional norms that have not been healthy for rural schools and rural communities. The challenge cannot be met easily, and poses dilemmas at least as convoluted as those faced by doctors and nurses at Tuskegee.

The Cosmopolitan Mission of "The University"

Universities are institutions that cultivate cosmopolitan rather than local purposes (cf. Atwell, 1993; Barrow, 1990; Barzun, 1968/1993; Bledstein, 1976; Hofstadter, 1955; Nisbet, 1971; Reisman, 1981; Trumpbour, 1989). This tradition is centuries-old and it evolved out of classical conceptions regarding the role education could play in improving the circumstances that together defined human life. Greeks and Romans of the classical period frequently appropriated funds to appoint state-sponsored professors (Marrou, 1945). These professors taught generations of Greek and Roman assemblymen, individuals charged with creating a vital community life through the policy arena. With the ascendancy of Christianity throughout Europe, the university became the vehicle for preparing ecclesiastical scholars and clerics charged with promoting a widespread spiritual vitality. In the case of both the classical, secular, polis-minded professor and his medieval, religious, deity-minded successor, however, the mission of higher education was tied to the welfare of the whole, and in particular the contribution it could make to the common good.

Over the course of many centuries, however, a subtle shift in emphasis took place. Gradually, the mission of serving the whole gave way to the mission of serving individuals. There is a long list of historical developments that worked to set (and keep) this trend in motion. Today, from our vantage point, it is not difficult to see that we stand firmly at the individual end of the individual-community continuum. Universities aggressively recruit students and sell themselves in the process by describing the long list of educational programs from which students can pick and choose. Universities now seek mostly to develop human capital.

One way to chart this shift in emphasis is to track across the centuries what happened to the discipline of philosophy as a field of study. During the middle ages, philosophy was the very pinnacle of university study. The reason for this was that it was the discipline that yielded clarity in matters of public policy. Today, in contrast,

philosophy departments are disappearing and they no longer represent anything close to the pinnacle of university study (though the highest academic degree attainable remains the doctor of philosophy).

The avenue toward clarity in matters of public policy has ceased to be the intellectual leverage policy-makers bring to traditional standards like truth, beauty, and justice. In fact, since the first decades of this century, policy-making has become nearly synonymous with deference to experts (Anderson, 1993). One circumstance that makes this evolution problematic is the fact that professional expertise, again, since the first decades of this century, has been acquired without significant philosophical study.

As noted above, there have been many developments caught up in the mix of events that has brought about the current state of affairs in higher education. We are going to focus briefly on two interacting and related developments, however, that will bring us to the matter of professionalizing professions and the university's role in that process. The first development was a conception of the human mind as little more than rationality itself. The second was a new and increasingly secular conception of the relationship between man's rational power and the evolving world economic system.

The first of these developments involves the preparation of a steadily increasing number of professions besides the clergy and professional scholars, including school teachers, physicians, lawyers, engineers, nurses, corporate management, public works administrators, social workers, accountants, therapists, and technicians of all stripes. Each of these professions exists and is cultivated on cosmopolitan terms. That is, each has a "knowledge base" taken to be common to all its practitioners and thinkers--norms, skills, concepts, commitments, and dispositions universally shared within the profession. The professions, and the related systems of preparation in higher education, deploy a view of theory and practice that is consistent with the

conception of the human mind traditionally diffused by the university. In its modern(ist) role of the site of preparation for the myriad professions, the university diffuses technical rationality as the form of mind most useful in the development of human capital. The forms of rationality (contemplation, reflection, critique) characteristic of philosophy were, if not utterly abandoned, relegated to the status of adornment, together, in fact with the rest of the liberal arts. Technical rationality, moreover, specifically excludes, or tends to diminish the scope and force of, such enduring human concerns as justice, beauty, and even truth. In this process, the relevance of intellect to emotion--to compassion, empathy, and delight is broken and often denied. In a real sense, professional preparation as ordinarily accomplished in the university, helps to subvert both intellect and feeling.

As the work of the mind (and thus the university) became increasingly restricted to what was deemed rational, a precise fit was created in terms of how the university might contribute to an ever more comprehensive economic realm. Systematic university study, not in philosophy or theology, but in mathematics and science, could allow mankind to harvest "the forces of nature" in the interest of generating ever greater riches or, as it came to be called, in the interest of creating "progress." Industrialization, urbanization and, today, globalization, are all at least indirect spin-offs of the university's contribution to improving the circumstances of individual lives on the eve of the twenty-first century.

Not every individual experiences "progress" in the same way. That is, not everyone's ship is lifted by this rising tide of economic utilities. Although rural areas have generally been backwaters of economic systems centered on cities (Jacobs, 1984), today rural areas are admonished that they need to become competitive in a global market. The exhortation is not based on adequate analysis, but serves rather as a rhetorical device to enlist even rural backwaters in the national effort to safeguard the global economic dominion of the US political economy. Whereas many educators

embrace such a call as a worthy educational effort, our opposition to this rhetoric as an adequate guide for educational strategy in rural areas is a matter of record (Howley, Howley, & Pendarvis, 1995; Theobald, 1997). We have concluded that rather than educating, such strategies further enforce an already prevalent rural miseducation.

The cosmopolitan character of the university, particularly the modern university that systematically evades philosophical study and discussion in favor of cultivating expertise, has largely abetted the forces that diminish rural lives and livelihoods.

Sense of Place and The Problematic Effort to Ruralize Teacher Education

We have been approached variously by institutions of higher education seeking to develop a rural focus in programs of personnel preparation (including undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs). We have also, on occasion, been asked to help various associations and agencies define sets of issues that uniquely define rural education as contrasted, for instance, with urban education.

Why does uncertainty about this problem exist? Why have such requests increased? In part, the answers to such questions are embedded in a perceptible shift from modern to postmodern perspectives, a rhetorical shift, if you will, in how people piece together the sense behind the circumstances affecting their lives. In past decades the questions were more difficult to articulate, the answers more difficult to hear, and the motives for posing them more obscure. We intuit that contradictions in the shift from a modern to postmodern worldview help motivate the questions by making them easier to articulate and the answers easier to hear. At least we hope so.

Throughout most of this century, rural education was a dilemma. With real earnestness and some outrage, people decade after decade asked, "Why must rural schools always lag behind?" It made little difference what manner of comparison was used, rural schools just never measured up to their urban and suburban counterparts. The characteristic modern concern with regard to rural education, then, was equity,

and the model of quality was presumed to be urban practice (cf. DeYoung, 1995; Theobald, 1995; Tyack, 1974). The challenge was to bring rural practice up to snuff, which meant conforming better to the universal knowledge elaborated in the urban frontiers of theory and practice.

Part of the concern, at least earlier in this century, was driven by fear over what kind of society lay at the end of a long process of cityward migration among rural youth. As one sociologist in the 1920s argued, rural areas were destined to become "fished-out ponds populated chiefly by bullheads and suckers" (Ross, 1922). Standing at the end of the twentieth century one can fairly argue that these fears were well-warranted. Rural towns and rural institutions suffered dramatically during this century and rather than arriving at the leisure-dominated, prosperous future so many predicted, working hours have gone up, real wages have gone down, unemployment in rural areas remains high, crime and all manner of abuse closely shadow the rural experience in this country (Rifkin, 1995; Shor, 1991).

It is becoming more and more apparent that the university has not been a neutral bystander with respect to the demise of rural community life in this country. As higher education restructured itself around the idea of the mind as rationality and the idea that it should properly be guided by economic instrumentalism, a culture became entrenched, a culture that contributed to the boarded-up main streets of rural America just as it contributed to the scandal at Tuskegee.

The turn away from the cultivation of virtue to the propagation of expertise in the modern university has coincided with the ascendancy of such cultural assumptions as efficiency is the first measure of effectiveness, bigger is better, technology is progress, and progress is always desirable. These assumptions have gone virtually unchallenged in the halls of ivy and they have helped to create a legacy of social and environmental problems as a result. Those of us who are skeptical of admonitions about the global economic competitiveness allegedly "needed" to enter the twenty-first

century are doubtful on the basis of twentieth-century catastrophes enabled by modernist ideas. We doubt that progress is always desirable; technology inevitably progressive; bigger, better; or efficiency synonymous with effectiveness (cf. Lasch, 1991, 1995). Doubt turns out to be a durable legacy of the enlightenment, at least in this circumstance.

If these doubts are acknowledged as valid, as they in fact have increasingly become throughout the postindustrial era, then the modern concern for equity as the essential project for rural education must also be doubted. And, in fact, there is good reason for complaint by rural communities. Rural communities have been denigrated, denuded, and depopulated, with the educational system of which rural schools are an integral part too often serving as a handmaiden to such purposes. Equity no longer implies, as it once did, the quest for social or economic justice. Instead, it now implies a concern for largely irrelevant formalities. If progress is in doubt, even the results of more approximate educational equity are doubtful. One can approximate equity without, for instance, approximating adequacy. It is a fact that the gap between rich and poor is increasing in the US (Weinberg, 1996).

Universalized professional knowledge provides scope adequate to such misguided purposes and results. Professionalized training has contributed to a national--and globalizing--political economy by propagating a culture of limitless consumption worldwide. Preparation for a lifetime of limitless consumption has characterized much, if not all, of twentieth-century mass education. Mass society requires mass education, founded as both are on mass production. Lost in the reckoning, however, is the sense of particularity and of differences. The French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979/1984) features difference as a key concept of the postmodern condition. The idea is really not so new, it has just become more salient in light of the proliferation of communication technology. Under the sway of "the modern," differences become obscured, expunged, and lost in the mass.

Toward Rural Teacher Preparation

Coinciding with the growing concern for standards in all educational forums has been an increasingly widespread recognition that the teaching profession, perhaps more than any other, is at its center a moral enterprise (Goodlad, 1990). Every decision a teacher makes affects the lives of many people, putting teacher decision-making squarely into a moral arena. Inquiry related to morality and moral behavior has traditionally been the preserve of the discipline of philosophy.

Nonetheless, many practicing teachers and some teacher educators as well see philosophical discussion, and even systematic study of educational philosophy in teacher education programs, as so much useless academic banter. As noted earlier, philosophical study is not believed to be a pertinent part of the education of professionals. This is a serious shortcoming for many professions, but it is particularly bothersome in the case of teacher preparation; teachers cannot go about their business without daily living an answer to one of the great, perennially recurring philosophical questions: "What constitutes an education?" Or, relatedly, "What constitutes an educated person?" Given their training (something that reflects modern cultural assumptions embraced and diffused by the modern university), teachers are uncomfortable trying to articulate answers to such questions, despite the fact that they do *live* the answers every day.

There are other gaps, one might say, in terms of what goes on in the name of teacher preparation. For instance, teachers are generally afforded little leverage over fundamental distinctions like the difference between education for the cultivation of civic virtue and education for wherewithal in the economic market, or education that enables one to recognize when the common good ought to be raised above one's own self-interest, or education that allows students to make a substantive contribution to the life of the immediate community versus an education that never engages community lives.

Standardization, division of labor, and high levels of mobility (geographic as well as occupational) ultimately attack and erode character, exacerbating the ill effects of the university turned away from virtue in favor of cultivating expertise.

Not only the character of individuals, but the character of places is eroded in this process. Though not yet widely recognized or acknowledged by school teachers (and the professional expert knowledge base of their practice), the eroding character of place is an educational disaster. "Sense of place" is, as a result, a concept that will be encountered more and more frequently in the future (McMichael, 1996). Its importance is perhaps easier to understand in relation to classical, rather than to modern, premises about experiences that are properly educational.

Properly educative experiences, at least on classical terms, develop strong characters capable of sacrifice in light of the human condition (cf. Arendt, 1958). On these terms, character derives from positive personal interaction, from commitments well-honored, and from obligations well met. A sense of place is therefore critical to the development of character. Classical education was also concerned with a mission that probably seems strange to modern sensibilities, but which is bound up with the human condition and with properly human purposes. That concern was with the manner of one's death.(2) In classical terms, mortality imposed a kind of obligation to act ethically. Education, properly construed, embraces that end as its primary mission.

Ethical action is always local action, an event in the evident world, not a thought. Mass education, mass society, and mass production are necessarily ignorant of localities and a sense of place is irrelevant to their purposes, or, relevant only so far as it advances those purposes (3). The cultivation of local character, and of individual character locally, has not been a purpose of mass schooling in the US. Instead, as Alan DeYoung has noted, mass schooling aims to create generic people whom one might recognize (and confidently employ) anywhere (DeYoung, 1995).

A group of teacher educators who decided that they were going to build a program that resonates with their rural locale and the experience of their graduates become rural teachers could consult powerful ideas that can inform their program building--ideas that we believe ought to animate all of teacher preparation, but must, in practice, honor the local genius that shapes character.

Sustainability

David Orr once wrote that "all education is environmental education." (Orr, 1992). What he meant was that everything we learn through formal schooling teaches us either that there are environmental consequences to human action or that there are no environmental consequences to human action. Regrettably, most of the de-contextualized textbooks that comprise school curriculums lead students to the conclusion that there is no pertinent connection between what they studied and the environment that supports their existence.

This disconnection between officially-sanctioned "studies" and the essence of life itself is a part of the larger cultural failing of modern society. It occurred, in part, because of our faith in the notion of progress, a faith that hinges on the belief that the world was without limits. While this belief persists in the most affluent industrial societies, it is rapidly losing its credibility. Huge population centers represent perfect conditions for the creation and spread of viruses. Doctors tell us of the growing resistance among various bacteria to anti-biotic drugs. There are a few diseases now, in fact, where only a single antibiotic blocks the proliferation of an epidemic.

What has become obvious, even to non-scientists is that the world's ecosystems cannot suffer indefinitely. The quality of life in the next century will depend on our ability to come to terms with a classical and medieval standard: harmony. In other words, consumption of the world's resources has to be in a direct proportion to our ability to renew them. We have to learn to consume within the carrying capacity of the

planet. Disasters greater than those that killed tens of millions during the twentieth century otherwise await us.

The fact that most of the schools in this nation operate in ways that are almost totally oblivious to the realities waiting for the residents of the next century is, again, a symptom of our larger cultural failings. Teacher preparation surely represents one of the fastest routes for addressing this cultural shortcoming. Teachers in rural schools can work directly with the results of environmental degradation and in the process connect the idea of sustainability, of learning how one might live in a place with the intention of passing it on seven generations of grandchildren, of other core ideas that make up a sophisticated response to the question: what constitutes an education?

Rural teachers, because they live and work at the site of the trouble (though it often results from decisions made elsewhere) have a special obligation to ground curriculum and instruction in the immediate locality. They have a special obligation to awaken students to the concept of limits and the notion of sustainability. Through concerted pedagogical attention to one's place, a teacher can deepen the student grasp of traditional "subjects," and at the same time develop and nurture a sense of place. Ultimately, however, living well in a place requires courage and a commitment to social justice.

Social Justice

A sense of place, as we argued previously, is a prerequisite for the development of character. Character is a prerequisite to the fulfillment of obligations. We could carry the argument further and say that fulfilling obligations is a prerequisite to a healthy sense of self-esteem, but it is at the level of obligation that we would like to focus.

The current attempt to restructure schools is also, at bottom, an attempt to reculture them as well. Attempts to restructure schools go on repeatedly. Attempts to

reculture them are extremely rare. At its most basic, educators everywhere are grappling with the idea that education ought to provide more than economic utility, it ought to make a societal contribution disposed to solve problems rather than create them, to chart out paths to a vibrant community life rather than those marked by the pursuit of self-interest. In short, people are wondering openly about how to cultivate an education for civic virtue.

Here another classical and medieval educational standard provides an answer: justice. The traditional school subjects can all be tied to one of the essential questions all peoples must engage. What will be the terms of our lives together as people who share a place on earth? If the terms are unfair one can predict the proliferation of all manner of human deviance. One can predict that envy will outstrip admiration, that narrow, short-term policy will seem more desirable than wholistic, long-term solutions. It is not difficult to envision the negative social and psychological consequences of injustice. Though no pedagogical effort could resonate better with the ideals that brought us together as a country, it is nevertheless culturally difficult for us to imagine how traditional school subjects might be marshaled in a way that advances local struggles against injustice.

Why do we study chemistry? Why do we study literature? Is it so that we might produce a nation of chemists? So that we might produce a nation of literary critics? We ask students to engage these subjects because they can yield intellectual leverage over the human condition. Absent the core educational ideal that social justice represents, there is nothing for students to leverage their studies against. Learning is reduced to the acquisition or identification of information. There is no "real" relevance. And, as Alfred North Whitehead argued so eloquently almost seventy years ago: "Knowledge keeps no better than fish" (Whitehead, 1929). Understanding endures, but it is not reached without the opportunity to apply and test knowledge in a context.

Justice is the perfect contextual lens for subject matter because it is a recurring issue for citizens who live in a democracy. It is particularly important, we believe, for rural teachers to possess a facility for connecting traditional school subjects to questions concerning social justice, because, once again, rural areas continue to define the results of injustice. One needs simply to point to the increases in rural unemployment, landlessness, crime, poverty, and to decreases in the availability transportation, newspapers, health care, jobs, and a whole range of social services, to demonstrate this principle.

Democracy

The last core idea that might inform teacher preparation focused on rural schools is also a classical standard: democracy. By definition, democracy means shared, concerted action. It is not rule by self-interested individuals, but rather, rule by people who share a particular place on earth (cf Arendt, 1958). If people are to make decisions together, then they must do so on the basis of what they share in common. Without this there could be no basis for agreement. The common-unity, the thing that unites a people in a particular place, including the health and well-being of the place itself, is, therefore, the *sine qua non* of democracy. Thus, it turns out, community is a prerequisite for democracy. What this means is that schooling ought to contribute directly to strengthening communities.

About forty years ago, the renowned anthropologist, Margaret Mead, wrote a lengthy essay in the *Harvard Business Review* entitled "Thinking Ahead: Why is Education Obsolete?" It is a provocative essay, well worth reading, but one passage is particularly poignant for today's circumstances:

> In thinking about an effective educational system we should recognize that the adolescent's need and right to work is as great

> as (perhaps greater than) his immediate need and right to study. And we must recognize that the adult's need and right to study more is as great as (perhaps greater than) his need and right to hold the same job until he is sixty-five years old (Mead, 1958).

Though Mead's message went unheeded for decades, the notion of adult education is at last beginning to make sense to us as a society and, similarly, the notion of providing youth with a chance to work, to make a substantial contribution to the way life happens in a community, is beginning to be recognized as a way to reculture schools.

Rural teachers can directly contribute to the reinvigoration of democracy in America by promoting curriculum and instruction that cultivates the local meanings of rural community life. This can come in the form of community theater, of beautification projects, of resource analysis and testing, or the generation of businesses. It can be as simple as third graders providing a fire alarm testing service or as complex as seniors working through an analysis of where a community's disposable income is spent. Melding traditional studies into direct contributions to community life is in essence cultivating civic virtue, or, said another way, it is first-rate enculturation into life in a democracy.

Conclusion

The astute reader will observe that these three core ideas must be mutually reinforcing and mutually dependent. But to understand them at the level at which they can inform a teacher preparation program tailored to the demands of schooling in rural areas one must understand the distinctions between them as well. For instance, we might achieve an admirable measure of social justice all the while that we press the environment beyond its carrying capacity. We might have widely available avenues of

transportation and communication, available health care, plenty of healthy low cost housing and food, and so forth, and yet remain powerless as a people to affect the circumstances in our own community. In other words, it is possible to live in a just society very much as slaves to absent decision-makers. In some ways this is how rural Americans *have* lived.

Somewhere along the way it was decided that the central point of schools was not the cultivation of civic virtue among its citizens but rather it was to achieve a wide array of economic satisfactions. This is why we must now not only restructure schools, but also reculture them. Teachers leaving a professional preparation program tailored to the proper obligations of rural circumstances will need to assess their efforts on ethical terms. Have we cultivated sustainable ways of living? Have we cultivated active commitments to social justice? Have we cultivated community as a deliberate contribution to democracy? These standards for school effectiveness reveal the scramble for incremental, and usually insignificant, increases in norm-referenced test scores to be profoundly misguided and, in fact, ill-fated.(4) We have left the days behind when a teacher might assess his or her efforts on the test scores of students.

Skeptics will argue that this is a tall order, and they won't be wrong. We have described a major shift in thinking about the public purpose of education. This shift, if it is widely embraced, would shake the very foundation of formal education during this century. As a consequence, one should not look for an across-the-board embrace of these ideas, at least not overnight. We believe, however, that rural schools and universities, because of the circumstances we have described, are best poised to begin the process.

Footnotes

1. Habermas articulates the concept of "systematic distortion" to denote

communication that is regularly and even logically biased toward the interests of domination. The distortions are ideological and rhetorical, but they inevitably exert dominating influence in the way people construct norms of professional practice, common sense, and even unreflective everyday behavior.

2. This concern is hardly unknown in the contemporary age; both existentialists and philosophers of the postmodern have appreciated it (e.g., Camus, 1942/1946; Foucault, 1988). Educators, however, are more familiar with death education, a very different affair.

3. Strip-mining, strip-cities and -towns, consolidated county schools, mega-feedlot animal "production," national advertising campaigns, Interstate highway landscapes, and so forth have all served as examples of such dishonor in the works of others (e.g., Berry, 1974; Jackson, 1995; Lasch, 1991). Interestingly, the examples are best understood for what they are from a rural perspective; we expect urban and suburban readers may be somewhat baffled by this claim. But urban parallels exist in huge housing projects for the poor, redlining by financial institutions, the destruction of neighborhoods, gentrification and so forth (cf. Jacobs, 1984).

4. This observation does not mean that student achievement is unimportant; it is paramount. Nevertheless, the scramble after test score increments is evil because it so often is used to affirm waste, injustice, and plutocracy. The scramble, in fact, dishonors rather than honors achievement.

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